

Ilyas



Lev Tolstoy

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In Ufa region, a Bashkir lived, Ilyas. Ilyas didn't inherit any wealth from his father. His father only married him off, and died a year after. At that time the Ilyas' property included: 7 mares, 2 cows, 2 dozen sheep. But Ilyas was a master and began to accumulate: worked from morning till night with his wife, got up before everyone and went to bed later than everybody, and was growing wealthier every year. Ilyas lived that way in works for 35 years and amassed a large property.

Ilyas accrued 200 horses, 150 heads of cattle, and 1200 sheep. Male workers tended Ilyas' herds, and female workers milked mares and cows and made koumiss (sour milk drink from horse's milk), butter and cheese. Ilyas had a lot of everything; and people envied Ilyas' life. People were saying: "Lucky this man Ilyas: he has a lot of everything, and has no need to die." Wealthy people started to get to know Ilyas and made acquaintances with him. Guests were coming to him from afar. And Ilyas welcomed them all and gave them food and drink. Whoever came, koumiss was ready for everybody, so as tea, and sherbet, and lamb. Whenever guests arrived, right away a ram or two was killed, and when many guests came, even a mare was slaughtered.

As for children, Elijah had two sons and a daughter. Ilyas married off his sons and the daughter. When Ilyas was poor, his sons worked with him, herded mares and sheep themselves, but when they became rich, his sons got spoiled and one of them started drinking. One son, the older, was killed in a fight, and the wife of another one, the youngest, was arrogant, and his son stopped listening to his father, and Ilyas had to split up with him.

Ilyas separated him, gave him a house and cattle, and his wealth had reduced. And soon after that Ilyas' sheep caught a disease, and many of them died. Next came a year of hunger - hay didn't grow, lost a lot of cattle that winter. Then the Kirgizes came and stole the best mares, and Ilyas' property started to subside. Ilyas started falling lower and lower. And he had less strength left in him. And when Ilyas approached his 70th, he started selling off his coats, rugs, saddles, wagons, and then began to sell all the remained cattle, and went

Ilyas down to nothing. And he didn't notice himself when nothing had left, and he had to go with his wife to live with people. Out of his estate, Ilyas only and had left: a dress on him, a fur coat, a hat and shoes with overshoes, and his wife, Sham-Shemagi, also an old one. His son, with whom who had parted, left to a distant land, and his daughter has died. And there was nobody to help the elders.

Their neighbor Muhamedshah took pity on the elders. Muhamedshah himself was neither poor nor rich, but lived steadily and was a good man. He remembered Ilyas' bread-and-salt, pitied him and said to Ilyas: "Come, - he said, - to me, Ilyas, with your woman, live with me. In summer, work on my melon garden according to your strength, and in winter – feed cattle, and let Sham-Shemagi milk mares and make koumiss. I'll feed, clothe both of you, and what you need - tell me, I will give." Ilyas thanked his neighbor and started to live with his wife as workers at Muhamedshah. It felt difficult at first, but after they got used to, the elderly started to live and to work at their own pace.

It was profitable for the owner to keep such people, because the elders were owners themselves and knew all canons and weren't lazy, worked as much as they were able to; but Muhamedshah felt pity to watch these high people falling on this low level.

It happened once, his distant in-laws came to Muhamedshah; and mullah came. Muhamedshah ordered to catch a ram and kill. Ilyas processed the ram, cooked it and sent to the guests. Guests ate the lamb, drunk tea and started koumiss. Guests sat with the owner on fluffy pillows, rugs, drank koumiss from cups and talked, but Ilyas finished his work and walked past the door. Muhamedshah saw him and said to the guests:

- Did you see the old man walked past the door?

- I saw, - a guest says, - and what's special in it?

- And special in that is that he was our richest man – his name is Ilyas, perhaps, you heard of him?

- How not to hear, - says the guest, - to see, I didn't see, but the glory of him went far.

- So now he has nothing left, and he lives on my property as a servant, and his old woman is with him, milks my mares.

The guest was surprised, clicked his tongue, shook his head and says:

- Wow, it looks like happiness flies like a wheel; it picks up some, drops down the others. And what's now, - says the guest, - he must be nostalgic, that old man?

- Who knows, he lives quietly, peacefully, works well.

And the guest said: - And can I talk with him? I'd like to ask him about his life.

- Well, that's possible! - said the host and called toward the place behind:

- Babai (means grandfather in Bashkirian), come out, drink koumiss and call your old woman.

And Ilyas entered with his wife. Ilyas greeted the guests and the host, read a prayer, and sat down on his knees by the door; but his wife went behind the curtain and sat with the hostess.

They filed up a cup of koumiss for Ilyas. Ilyas thanked the guests and the master, bowed, sipped a little and put aside.

- Grandpa, - says the guest, - it must be depressing for you, I assume, while looking at us, to recall your previous life – how you were in happiness and how you now live in grief?

And chuckled Ilyas and said:

- If I tell you about happiness and unhappiness, you will not believe; better ask my woman; she is – what's on her heart, so is on her tongue; she'll tell you all the truth about this case of ours.

And the guest said toward behind the curtain:

- Well, grandma, tell, how do you judge the past happiness and the present grief?

And Sham-Shemagi answered out of the curtains:

- And here's how I judge: we lived with the old man for fifty years - searched for happiness and didn't find, and now is only the second year since we have nothing left and we live in workers, we found real happiness and don't need any other.

The guest amazed, and the host was surprised, even half rose, moved the curtain aside to see the old woman. And the old woman stands there, arms folded, grinning, looking at his old man, and the old man grins, too. The old woman says again:

- I tell you the truth, no kidding: half a century we have searched for happiness, and, while we were rich, we haven't found it; now there's nothing left, went live with people, - found such happiness that there's no need in any better.

- But in what is your happiness now?

- And here's it what: when were we rich, we did not have even an hour of rest; no talk, no thinking of soul, no praying to God. How much cares we had! One day guests visit us, - we care who to treat with what, what gift to give, so that they're not upset with us. The guests would leave – we're watching after the workers – as they tend to relax and to eat sweeter, and we're watching so that our goods wouldn't be stolen - sinners. The other concern was so that a wolf wouldn't devour a foal or a calf, and thieves wouldn't steal our horses. Only lie down - can't sleep – what if sheep crush their lambs. Walk, walk during the night; only calm down - again worry how to save enough of feed stock for the winter. And not only that, we didn't have an agreement with the old man, either. He used to tell that need to do things this way, but I'd say another, and begin to sin and curse. That's how we lived

from care to care, from one sin to another, and haven't seen a happy life.

- Well, and about now?

- Now we will get up, then will always talk lovingly, in agreement, we have nothing to argue about, nothing to care about – our only cares are to serve the master. We work as much as we're able to, work with desire, so that the master is not losing but profiting. We return – and there is lunch, there is dinner, there is koumiss. If cold - there is a warm dung coat. And there is time when to speak, and to think about the soul, and to pray to God. Fifty years we're looking for happiness, now only found.

The guests laughed.

But Ilyas said:

- Don't laugh, brothers, this is not a joke, but human life. And we were foolish with the old woman and we were crying earlier, when had lost the wealth, but now God has shown us the truth, and we are opening it for you, not for your delight but for your own good.

And mullah said:

- This was a wise speech, and all Ilyas said is complete truth, it is also written in the Scripture.

And guests stopped laughing and began to think.